BENIN PROVINCE. UGHU

WP. 14933

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INTELLIGENCE REPORT ON THE UGHU VILLAGE GROUP
BENIN DIVISION

BY

MR. J.E. JULL A . D .O.

July 1937.

II. HISTORICAL.

3. Nine of the thirteen villages are said to be descended from a legendary ruler called Alegbe (a son of the first Oba of Benin) who is alleged to have founded an independent state of Ughu with its capital at Umughumu in the thirteenth century. Of the remaining four villages Ologho consists of original inhabitants of this area who were conquered by the Ughus. Obajere and Emioboma were originally founded by settlers from Ologho in the 17th century and were subject to Umughumu n'Okwa. In more recent times there has however been an influx of invaders who have virtually submerged the inhabitants. Obajere was occupied by a Benin garrison whilst Emioboma received numerous Sobo migrants from across the River Ethiope. The three Sobo settlements of Ugbigun, Ekigbe and Iweworo also established themselves under Obajere in the last century. Iguenaba is also inhabited by descendants of the original occupants of the area but was never subject to the Oba of Ughu nor was it associated with the subsequent federation.

4. In the fifteenth century Oba Ozolua of Benin attacked the Ughu state and completely overran it. The Oba of Ughu fled to Ishan. The majority of his followers took refuge with a descendant of the second son of Alegbe who founded a village called Umughumu n'Okwa (large Umughumu). He eventually made his submission to the Oba of Benin and retained control over a large portion of the area. The Oba of Ughu later made his peace with the Oba of Benin and returned to found the village of Umughumu n'Uzuagbor but was thenceforth overshadowed by the Onogie of Umughumu n'Okwa. In accordance with their usual policy the Obas of Benin appear to have discouraged local federation and to have controlled each village directly from Benin by means of intermediaries termed "Onotueyewo". This policy was strengthened by the establishment of Benin garrisons to ward off Sobo and Jekri raids. It was further encouraged by the appointment of District Heads in 1916.

III. ADMINISTRATIVE.

5. The village administrative organisation was as usual based on the three age-grades of Eroghai, Ighele and Edion. The Edion age-grade was the senior and formed the village council. The oldest member of the age-grade, the Odionwere,

was recognised as village head save in those few villages where there was a hereditary chief styled Onogie, but the Odionwere alwasy controlled the age-grades.

6. The old organisation of the Ughu village Group has long ceased to function and to all intents and purposes the area is now occupied by thirteen independent village units. All of the villages except Iguenaba have occasionally met on the site of ancient Umughumu, where the Inyhator juju of Alegbe is still preserved, to discuss their affairs. Although such a meeting has only been convened three times since 1897 the people still call themselves " the sons of Alegbe" and acknowledge a common relationship. The District Head system was abolished in 1935 and since then the Oba of Benin, the Native Authority, has dealt direct with each village.

IV. JUDICIAL.

8. In each of the villages the village councils formed the judiciaries under the ancient system and met for this purpose in the Ogwa Edion (porch of the Elders), save in villages where there was a hereditary chief when they met in his house. The Owedion or messenger of the Edion age-grade assisted in summoning parties and collecting fines but the Ighele age-grade were the real police force. Disputes between villages were dealt with by a joint meeting of the village councils concerned. Appeal nominally lay to the Oba of Benin but, owing to the distance and expense of a journey to Benin, was rarely exercised.

9. In 1915 the Usomehe Native Court was established in present Usonigbe District and also had jurisdiction over all the villages in the area under report. Members were selected from the Onogies and representatives of the Edion age-grade.

10. In 1921 the Court was moved to Usonigbe and retained jurisdiction over the nine Ughu villages and Ologho. Obajere, Emioboma and Iguenaba then came under the Jesse Native Court until it was transferred to the Warri Province in January 1937 since when they have had no Native Court.

WO 116933

INTELLIGENCE REPORT ON THE UGHU VILLAGE GROUP

BENIN DIVISION

BY

MR. J.E. JULL A.D.O.

July 1937.

This report deals with thirteen villages and three large Sobo settlements lying in the extreme south-east of the Benin Division in the north-western and southern part of the administrative area known as the Usonigbe District and in the northern part of the former Jesse District.

2. Nine of these thirteen villages are inhabited by descendants of invaders from Benin City who call themselves " the sons of Alegbe" in virtue of their descent from Alegbe, a legendary ruler who is said to have founded an independent Bini kngdom in this area about the thirteenth centruy, called the kingdom of Ughu. These nine villa-ges are hereafter referred to as the Ughu villages.

3. Of the remaining villages, Ologho is inhabited by descendants of the original occupants of this area who were subdued by the early Obas of Ughu ; they are considered "servants" rather than "sons" of Alegbe. Obajere and Emioboma are villages founded by settlers from Ologho probably in the seventeenth century who, during the last century, have been submerged under an influx of immigrants of different stock; Emioboma by Sobos from the Warri Province;Obajere by a garrison from Benin City. The above twelve villages were members of a loosely-knit federation which is the sole surviving relic of the ancient kingdom of Ughu.

4. Iguenaba, like Ologho, is inhabited by descendants of the original occupants of this area. It was, however, never subject to the Obas of Ughu nor has it ever been a member of the federation that grew up on the ruins of this kingdom. It is a completely isolated unit that has been included in this Report because its people wish to join with the Ughu Villages for financial and judicial purposes.

5. Near Obajere lie the Sobo settlements of Ugbigun, Ekigbe and Iweworo founded about the middle of the last century by immigrants from the Sobo villages across the River Ethiope.

6. The people of the nine Ughu villages are of the usual short light-complexioned Bini type and speak a dialect

of the Bini language hardly distinguishable from that of Benin City. The people of Ologho and Iguenaba are of a darker type, approximating to the Sobo type rather than the Bini: their dialect differs but little from that of the Ughu villages. The people of Obajere are a mixture of the two types with the Bini predominating: Emioboma is now to all intents and purposes a Sobo village three - quarters of the inhabitants are of Sobo origin and very few of the younger men can speak or understand the Bini language.

7. The houses of the people are rectangular mud buildings with roofs of leaves and the villages, except Emioboma, consists of clusters of houses situated in the middle of high forest. The three quarters of Emioboma and the Sobo settlement of Ekigbe consist of two parallel lines of houses running at right angles to the banks of the River Ethiope. The settlements of Ugbigun and Iweworo consist of groups of from four to a dozen houses scattered at intervals over their farming land. A few houses with corrugated iron-roofs are to be found in the larger Ughu villages, and at Ologho and Emioboma.

8. The usual dress of the older men is a cloth wrapped round the body with one end thrown over the left shoulder: the younger men wear "shorts" and a singlet or shirt. At Emioboma and the Sobo settlements the most usual dress is a long imported cloth, girt up at the waist, above which the older men wear a coat of European cut, the younger a singlet and cloth cap.

9. The main occupation of the people is farming, though a number of the younger men are now finding employment on the local timber concessions. There are a number of small traders in palm-kernels and a few petty shop-keepers at Emioboma.

10 The United African Church ha-s two schools in the Ughu villages : there are no others in the area. Education is limited to a small number of the wealthier class, but at Obajere, Emioboma and the Sobo settlements there are a number of youths who have picked up a smattering of the three "Rs" from intermittent attendance at schools in the neighbouring villages across the River Ethiope in the Warri Province.

11. There are three timber camps in the area, one near Umughumu n'Uzuagbor belonging to the Nigerian Hardwood Company and two in the western pa-rt, between Ebazogbe

n'Ughu and Urhehue, belonging to the United Africa Company. The great majority of the unskilled labourers are Ishans or Ibos. There is a small settlement of Ikas near Umughumu n' Uzuagbor and numerous small sobo camps along the northern bank of the River Ethiope upstream from Obajere. Nearly the whole of this area is included in the Benin Native Administration Usonigbe Forest Reserve.

13. The following local terms are used:-

Onogie : Hereditary Chieftain.
Odion (Plural Edion) : Elder.
Odionwere (Plural Edionwere): Senior elder.

II. GEOGRAPHICAL.

15. All the villages under report lie on the southern slope of the watershed that divides the Jamieson and Ethiope Rivers. The north-western and ventral parts are heavily timbered but in the south -where the country sinks down to the River Ethiope the forest thins away and its place is taken by the broad tracts of open grasscountry known as the Sobo Plains. Besides the River Ethiope which forms the southern boundary of this area there are only three streams: the Oroghodo which flows down from the Agbor District and disappears into swamp near Ewosi: and the Awan and Onyachian which flow into the River Ethiope near Emioboma. The central villages are dependent on surface-wells for their water-supply.

16. The area is approximately 400 square miles in extent and has an estimated population of 8300. The density of population is therefore about 20 to the square mile.

III. HISTORICAL.

17. The people of Iguenaba and Ologho claim to have occupied their present sites from "Ogiso times", that is from before the coming of the present line of Obas to Benin City, but history begins with the coming of Alegbe who is said to have been a son of Ewekan, the first Oba of Benin. This Alegbe, after an unsuccessful struggle for the throne with his half-brother, Idu, founded a rival kingdom which according to local tradition originally extended from a point four miles east of Benin City to the River Ethiope. The capital of this kingdom was called Umughumu and was situated about half a mile to the south of the present village of Urhehue. From here Alegbe founded the villages of Ewosi, Oben, Ebazogbe n'Ughu and Ikobi and set his sons

to rule over them: he also established his supremacy over all the clans to the east of the River Ossiomo - known collectively to the people of Benin City as the Iyekhoriomo. By the fifteenth century the River Ossiomo had become the eastern boundary of this Kingdom.

18. In the reign of the Oba Ozolua (about 1480) the Oba n'Ughu's outposts along the east bank of the River Ossiomo were driven in and in the succeeding reign the Oba Esigie, established control over Iguenaba and Ologho and settled a Bini garrison at Ologbo : in the same reign Esigie's son, Ehengbuda, from his headquarters at Ugo, overran the whole area an-d destroyed Umughumu entirely, leaving a band of the Oba's executioners behind to hunt down and exterminate all who refused submission to the Oba of Benin and remained faithful to the Oba n'Ughu. This band of executioners founded the village of Urhehue or" place of hunters". The Oba n'Ughu, Ogiewon, fled to Ugun in the Ishan Division with a few faithful followers but the majority of his subjects submitted and took refuge with the descendant of the second son of Alegbe, who ruled over the village now known as Umughumu n'Okwa (large Umughumu) which soon became the largest and most powerful village in the area. At some later period, Ogiewon made his submission to the Oba of Benin and returned to settle to the north of Ewosi where he founded the village of Umughumu n'Uzuagbor at a later period as an outpost against Ika invaders from the north-east.

19. From this time onwards, though the Onogie of Umughumu n'Uzuagbor is admittedly the senior Onogie in the group, the Onogie of Umughumu n'Okwa has been the most powerful. The inhabitants of Ologbo and Urhehue through intermarriage with the women of the neighbouring villages merged their identity with that of the soms of Alegbe and became tributary to the Onogie of Umughumu n'Okwa, who in course of time also established his suzerainty over Ologho and its two offshoots, Obajere and Emioboma. Ewonogbon, a village on the River Ethiope included in the area recently transferred to the Warri Province was also founded from Umughumu n'Okwa as a trading station.

20. In the early years of the last century, the Oba Loisa sent a Bini garrison to occupy Obajere - until then known as Eko Ologho - a-nd protect this area from Sobo and Jekri raids. Later, in the reign of the Oba Adolor (about 1860) Sobos from Agbasa and Ologun in the Warri Province

settled at Emioboma in the quarters known as Agbasa and Ajayibo, while shortly afterwards more Sobos from Igun, Eku and Ewohimi, harassed by the constant raids of the Jekri Chieftain, Olomu, father of Nana, crossed the River Ethiope and sought shelter near Obajere, where they founded the settlements of Ugbigun, Iweworo and Ekigbe respectively.

21. UNDER BRITISH RULE. No resistance was offered to the establishment of Government control over this area. The villages were administered directly through their village Heads by political officers from Benin City from 1897 until the formation of the Benin Native Administration in 1914. On the introduction of the District Head system in 1916 all the villages under report, together with the Usonighe and Usomehe villages and the area to the north-west now known as the Ugboko District, were included in the Usonigbe District and came under the jurisdiction of the local Native Court which had been established at Usomehe in 1915. In 1917 Obajere, Emioboma and Iguenaba, on account of the large number of Sobos on their land, were detached from the Usonigbe District and incorporated in the Jesse District - which had in that year been transferred from the Warri to the Benin Province - under the jurisdiction of the Jesse Native Court. In 1921 the Ugboko District was carved out of the north-western part of the old Usonigbe District and the jurisdiction of the local Native Court, which was in the same year removed to Usonigbe, limited to the nine Ughu villages, Ologho and the Usonigbe and Usomehe villages. The above villages were all, from 1916 until the abolition of the post of District Head in 1936, under the administrative control of the local District Head who resided originally at Usomehe but from 1927 onwards at Usonigbe. In January 1927 the Jesse District, with the exception of Obajere, Emioboma and Iguenaba, and the three Sobo settlements of Ugbigun, Ekigbe and Iweworo was transferred back again to the Warri Province. The six last-named communities are not now under the jurisdiction of any local Native Court.

22. Direct taxation was first introduced in these villages in 1919. The ra-te enforced was two shillings per adult, male and female; adolescent boys and girls paid one shilling each. In 1928 a flat rate of seven shillings per adult male was substituted, with increased

rates for certain occupations. In 1933 the flat rate was reduced to six shillings with corresponding reductions in the occupational rates.

IV. ADMINISTRATION.

23. Description of Ancient System.

The lowest administrative unit was the village and the ancient village administrative organisation rested on the division of the adult male population into three age-grades namely the (1) Eroghai
(2) Ighele
(3) Edion

24. The Eroghai age-grade consisted of all the youths of the village between the ages of fifteen and thirty. Their duties were to clean the village streets and farm paths, carry the annual tribute of yams to the Oba and in general perform all the lighter communal work of the village. This age-grade was directed in its tasks by a leader called the Okairoghai, a senior member of this age-grade chosen for his ability.

25. The Ighele age-grade consisted of all the men between the ages of thirty and forty-five. The main duty of this age-grade was to act as the police and fighting force of the village and to collect the annual tribute of yams to be carried to Benin City by the Eroghai : it was also held responsible for the upkeep of the public buildings of the village. Its activities were directed by one of its older members called the Okaighele who like the Okairoghai was selected for his ability.

26. At or about the age of forty-five an Ighele passed into the Edion age-grade which consisted of all the older men of the village under the presidency of the Odionwere. In all the villages under report, except Iguenaba, the Odionwere was the oldest member of the Edion age-grade, but at Iguenaba - which is divided into two "Idumu" or quarters - the Odionwere was the oldest elder for Idumolo, the senior "Idumu", not necessarily the oldest elder in all Iguenaba.

27. In a village where there was no hereditary chieftain, there was no other class of person than the three mentioned above. The Odionwere was the village head and the village authority was the Odionwere in Council

with all his village Edion. The meetings of this village Council were held in a rectangular oblong mud building known as the Ogwa Edion or Porch of the Elders. This building was generally situated near the centre of the village.

28. In villages where there was a hereditary chieftain, the hereditary chietain (i.e. the Ongie) was the village Head and the administrative authority for the village was the hereditary chieftain presiding over the village Council consisting of the Odionwere and the rest of the Edion. This meeting was held in the Onogie's house. The Onogie, besides being a person of greater dignity, exercised a grea-ter personal influence than an Odionwere and was conceded a considerable latitude in issuing instructions on his own initiative : he could not, houwever, afford to antagonise the Odionwere and Edion as it was they who controlled the age-grade organisation.

29. In all village, whether the Village Head was a hereditary chieftain or an Odionwere, an individual member of the Ighele age-grade was chosen by the Edion to act as the messenger of the Village Council. He was called the Owedion or "Foot of the Elders" : he seems, however, to have functioned as a judicial rather than an executive messenger.

30. In all villages where a hereditary chieftain was the Village Head there was a fourth class of persons known as Ekhaime or titled men. These titles were not hereditary and were obtained by purchase from the Onogie. These Ekhaime were mere courtiers or palace officials and though they attended the Onogie to the village council they were not allowed to sit as members of it unless they were also Edion.

31. The Sobo settlers of Ugbigun, Ekigbe and Iweworo came from villages in the Warri Province which had an organisation practically identical with that of a Bini Village without a hereditary chieftain. Although these settlements have been founded for nearly a hundred years, the inhabitants have never cut themselves adrift from the age-grade organisation of their parent communities across the River Ethiope and have not therefore evolved a village organisation of their own.

32. There were two units consisting of more than one village. The village of Ogba was an offshoot of

Umughumu n'Uzuagbor and was subject to the Onogie of that village. The authority for this small group was the Onogie of Umughumu n'Uzuagbor presiding over a joint meeting of both Village Councils at Umughumu n'Uzuagbor.

33. The five villages tributary to the Onogie of Umughumu n'Okwa - Urhehue, Ologbo, Ologho, Obajere and Emioboma - were not in any sense akin to Umughumu n'Okwa but paid tribute to its Onogie as the most powerful Village Head in the locality and as " the owner of the land ". There was no joint meeting of the six villages of this group. In return for the tribute paid him the Onogie provided them protection, when necessary, but he had no power to intervene in their internal administration. It is interesting to note that each of these tributary villages paid their tribute to and approached the Onogie of Umughumu n'Okwa through the holder of a particular title among his Ekhaime in the same way a-s will be shown later, that each of the villages under report paid their tribute to the Oba through the holder of a particular title among the Oba's titled men.

34. There was no authority for the whole group of villages under report but all of them, except Iguenaba,were accustomed to attend at irregular and infrequent intervals a meeting called the "Iko Ivie Alegbe" (Meeting of the sons of Alegbe) at the Inyhator juju of Alegbe on the deserted site of the ancient Umughumu destroyed by Ehengbuda.This meeting was an assembly of equals - equals that is, in status, if not in stature - and no Village Head could be said to preside over it. Resolutions made at this meeting could not be forced by a majority upon a dissentient village and it was therefore a conference rather than an authoritative body.

35. It should be explained that the Inyhator juju is an Ekhimi tree planted outside his house by the founder of a family or village and supposed to be inhabited by a spirit which promotes the fertility of the inhabitants, livestock and crops of the particular community.

36. Each of the villages under report was represented at the Court of the Oba in Benin City by a Bini titled man whom the people refer to as their Onotueyewo (" he who salutes for the people") or sponsor in the palace. The position of Onotueyewo for each village was appropriated to the holder of a particular title who acted as the intermediary between the central authority of the Oba and

the particular village he sponsored. The main - in some cases - the sole-duty of an Onotueyewo was to see that the annual tribute was paid to the Oba in good time, but an Onotueyewo was also as a rule the channel through which instructions from the Oba were conveyed to the subject village Head. Each village paid its annual tribute to the Oba through its own particular Onotueyewo and he was entitled to deduct a portion of this tribute for his own use : it was also his duty - or rather perquisite - to introduce deputations from a village into the presence of the Oba. An Onotueyewo had no administrative control over the village or villages he sponsored.

37. The Onogies of Umughumu n'Uzuagbor and Ewosi - of whom the first is the senior Onogie of the group and the latter two, the most powerful - claim that though the annual tribute from their villages was paid through their Onotueyewo, they personally had the right to approach the Oba direct and that instructions from his were conveyed to them, not thro ugh their Onotueyewo, but directly by personal messengers of the Oba. A list of the titles of the Onotueyewo of each village is given in Appendix'B'.

38. It should be added that at Ologho and Emioboma where, it is surmised, the people were apt to be unpunctual in paying their tribute, the Oshodi, who was the Onotueyewo for both village, posted one of his servants to supervise the collection. This person who made his headquarters at Ologho was known as the Ukusuewo (he who looks after the people).

39. There are no women's societies or organisations in any of the villages in this area. But wherever the cult of the Olokun juju is strong the shrine was tended by a priestess known as the Iyashere who obtained her title by purchase from the Onogie - where there was one - and the Edion and whose duty was to avert the danger of war and disease from the community and safeguard the fertility of its crops by performing the appropriate sacrifices. At Emioboma there was a head woman of the village known as the Okpako Eweya (head of the wives). Her main duty was to supervise the moral conduct of the women of the town : in this capacity she used to sit with the Village Council when adultery cases were heard.

40. <u>Under British Rule.</u> From 1897 until 1914 the

villages were administered by their Village Heads - with or without the assistance of the village Edion, under the control and supervision of the District Officer Benin Division. In 1914 the Oba was made Native Authority for the whole Division and was assisted in the task of supervising and controlling the various Village Heads by a Council composed of the eight most important Bini Chiefs. In 1916 the Division was divided into Districts which were placed under the control and supervision of a Bini Chief called the District Head who was supposed to reside for the greater part of his time in the District under his charge. All the villages under report were from 1916 to 1917 under the control of the District Head of Usonigbe District with headquarters at Usomehe. In April, 1917, Obajere, Emioboma and Iguenaba came under the control of the District Head at Jesse. In 1923 the District Head Jesse was recalled as the result of repeated complaints from the Sobo villages round Jesse and his place never filled : since then these three villages have been under the direct control of the Oba.

41. The District Head of Usonigbe District exercised control over the nine Ughu villages, Ologho, the Usonigbe and Usomehe villages and all the villages in the present Ugboko District from his headquarters at Usomehe until 1921. In that year the Ugboko District was formed and the jurisdiction of the District Head at Usomehe reduced to the present limits of the Usonigbe District. In 1927 the District Head removed his headquarters to Usonigbe. In 1934 the District Head was recalled from Usonigbe as the result of repeated complaints from the Usonigbe villages and each village in the District then came under the direct control of the Oba. The District Head system was finally abolished in June 1936.

42. Meanwhile the Oba's Central Council has grown from the original eight members to a body consisting of the six Uzama (hereditary Bini Nobles), sixteen Eghaivbo n'Ore (Non-hereditary titled men of Benin City) and twenty-seven Eghaivbo n'Ogbe (Non-hereditary titled officials of the royal household).

43. T a x. Nominal rolls are compiled for each village by the Village Head with the assistance - when necessary - of a literate youth. These are then submitted

for checking to the Head Assessment Office at Benin City. Subsequently the requisite number of consecutively numbered tax-receipt tickets is issued to the Village Head by the District Officer together with a demand note signed by the Oba specifying the amount due and the date by which it is to be collected. Tax is paid into the Native Administration Treasury through one of the Assessment Scribes and the Village Head receives a remuneration equal to five per cent of the gross tax collected by him. He may or may not share this amount amongst the members of the village Council : it is as he pleases. A Village Head who is an Odionwere invariably does.

44. The flat rate of tax has since 1933 been six shillings per adult male with higher rates for certain occupations. Resident adult male "strangers" provided they do not pay one of the occupational rates - are liable to a residential rent of five shillings. In addition, if they farm they have to pay an annual Farming Rent of ten shillings : if they collect palm produce, an annual Palm Product Permit Fee of eight shillings ; while the headman of a camp of such palm-produce collectors has to pay annually the sum of £1.

Porposals for the Future.

45. Survivals. There are now no titled men or Ekhaime in any of the villages under report except at Umughumu n'Okwa. Otherwise the pre-government village administrative orgnisation has survived intact in every village except Emioboma. Here the organisation of the younger men into Eroghai and Ighele has collapsed : they are merely the younger men of the village and have no organisation. There is still, however, an Edion age-grade. Emioboma, as mentioned above, was an offshoot of Ologho and it was the custom, before the influx of Sobos, for the elders of Emioboma to enter the Edion age-grade by performing the requisite sacrifices to the Edion juju at Ologho, their parent town. This custom has survived to the extent that elderly inhabitants of Emioboma - whether of Bini origin or not - who have been born or brought up at Emioboma and consider it their permanent abode still enter the Edion age-grade at Ologho and are entitled to style themselves Edion of Emioboma as opposed to the elderly Sobo residents, called Okpako, who are not - and do not

intend to become-permanent residents. There is thus enough left of the pre-government organisation at Emioboma to establish a village authority on a traditional basis. The office of Owedion or messenger of the Edion has died out in this village.

46. The three Sobo settlements of Ugbigun, Ekigbe and Iweworo - all lying on Obajere land - have no age- grade organisation of their own. It should be noted that though these settlements were founded nearly a century ago, a compa-ratively small number of the inhabitants are descended from the original founders, the majority of the population being of the kind called floating. There is in fact a continual ebb and flow of the inhabitants to and fro from their parent villages across the River Ethiope. However, since the time of the Oba Overami, at least, elderly permanent Sobo inhabitants of these three settlements, provided they are of good standing, have been allowed by the Obajere elders to enter the Obajere Edion age-grade. Such Sobos provide a method of representing their settlements under the control of the Odionwere of Obajere. In theory such persons are of equal standing with the native Edion Of Obajere and could - it is said - become Odionwere : in practice they do not become Odionwere, because when they reach such an advanced age they prefer to return to their parent villages across the River Ethiope.

V. J U D I C I A L.

56. Description of Pre-government System.

In each of the villages under report the Village Council as described in the Administrative section were also the judiciaries. Where an Odionwere was the Village Head, the meeting was held in the Ogwa Edion (Porch of the elders): where an Onogie in the Onogie's house. The Owedion acted as the messenger of Court summoning parties before it and collecting fines from convicted persons. The Ighele acted as the village police force, arresting criminals and helping the Owedion in the colle-ction of fines where he met with resistance.

57. Cases between persons of different villages were heard by a joint meeting of the two Village Councils, as a general rule in the village of complainant, but when one party came from a village with an Onogie and the other from a village with an Odionwere as its Village Head, the case was alwa-ys heard in the Onogie's village.

58. There was no compulsion upon the accused's village elders to enforce the penalties imposed by such a joint meeting of the two villages, except the knowledge that the complainant's village would retaliate in the same way to the disadvantage of both villages.

59. An appeal lay from any decision of a village council to the Oba but the distance and expense of the journey to Benin City were such that none but Village Heads or titled men could afford to exercise this right.

60. The penalties inflicted for the various offences were as follows:-

M u r d e r : The guilty man was sent to the Oba as a slave and generally reserved for human sacrifice.

Manslaughter. The guilty man was sent to the Oba with a report of the circumstances : if the Oba found that the killing was the result of an excusable accident, the homicide might be released ; otherwise he was enslaved

A r s o n. The penalty for this crime was banishment.

L a r c e n y: The thief was forced to restore the stolen property or its equivalent, and findd one or two goats, according to the custom of the particular village.

A s s a u l t: Ordinary assault was not considered a criminal offence. Aggravated assault, that is, assault with wounding or an assault by an Eroghai or Ighele upon an Odion, was punished by a fine of one goat.

In subordination on the part of any member of the two junior age-grades to the Odionwere was punished by the confiscation of two stacks of yams.

A d u l t e r y: This was not strictly speaking a criminal offence, but as the aggrieved husband could go on appropriating the adulterers livestock and yams indefinitely without the adulterer being able to obtain any redress from the Village Council, it was usual for the adulterer to approach the Village Council with a request to effect a consiliation. The adulterer was then ordered to give one goat to the Edion and to pay in compensation to the husband either one or two goats, and in addition,

in the Sobo settlements a thousand cowries or a case of gin.

61. Fines were distributed amongst the Edion, a share being allotted to the Owedion and the rest of the Ighele.

62. Under British Rule. The Usomehe Native Court founded in 1915 with jurisdiction over the villages of the present Usonigbe and Ugboko Districts and over Obajere, Iguenaba and Emioboma consisted of about sixteen members who were either Onogies, or Edion chosen to represent them by the Odionwere of villages where there was no hereditary chieftain. When with the formation of the Ugboko District in 1921, this Court was removed to Usonigbe and its jurisdiction limited to the Usonigbe and Usomehe villages, the nine Ughu villages and Ologho, its members were reduced to an average of nine, of whom six came from the ten last-named villages. The Jesse Native Court, under whose jurisdiction Obajere, Iguenaba and Emioboma have been since 1917 was constituted on the same lines. Obajere and Iguenaba had one Court Member each : Emioboma none.

63. Both the Usonigbe and Jesse Native Court exercised 'B' grade powers until 1934 when they were reduced to 'C' grade. Bothe Courts have been subject to the appellate jurisdiction of the Oba's Court at Benin City. This Court founded in 1916 as the Oba's Judicial Council originally consisted of the eight most important Bini titled men : it is now known as the Oba's Court and consists of four members under the vice presidency of the Iyashere.

Proposals for the Future.

64. Survivals. The considerable distances of all the villages under report from their local Native Courts has tended to preserve the Village Councils as a means of settling disputes, both civil and criminal. The Village elders are accustomed to arbitrate in any civil dispute brought before them by members of their own village. As a general rule the only civil cases that are brought to either the Usonigbe or the Jesse Native Courts are those between persons of different villages or when one of the parties has refused to abide by the finding of the elders. From unguarded remarks dropped by the elders in various villages it appears that they are still accustomed to punish insubordinate members of the Eroghai and Ighele by confiscating their fowls and yams, while there are grounds for believing that at Obajere and Emioboma, at least, criminal offences such as stealing are dealt with by the

village elders, the penalties imposed by them being of so lenient a nature that it is not worth the criminals while to complain. The complainant acquiesces in such an arrangement presumably because he recovers the property stolen or its equivalent. It is said that the person found guilty has also to give a "dash" to the Edion.

MAP OF UGHU

ROAD

NEW

UGO

UMUGHUMUNU'UZUAGBOR

USOMEGHE

EBAZOGBE-NUGHU

IKORI

OBEN

IGHENDBA

EWOSI

USONIGBE

URHE UHE
INYHA TOR-ALEGBE

UMUGHUMUN'OKWA.

OLOGBO

OLOGHO

EMIOBOMA

IWEWORO

OBAGERE

UGBIGUN

EMIGBE

PROVINCIAL BOUNDARY
DIVISSIONAL "
MOTOR ROAD
CYCLE "
BUSH PATH
RIVER OR STREAM

AREA UNDER

